



6.0 EMIGRANT GAP RIDGE



6.1 Area Description

Number of Points: 83

Number of Structures: 15

BLM Ownership: 3,317 acres (5 parcels)

Emigrant Gap Ridge had nearly 500,000 pioneers pass through in the great journey west. The Oregon, Pioneer, California, and Mormon Trails all passed through this area. Today it is site to rural homes, ranching, recreation use, history enthusiasts, and elementary education. Emigrant Ridge is composed of two anticlines that run north to south starting just south of Poison Spider Road and ending at Casper Mountain. The North Platte River divides the ridge east to west. The area of interest is from Poison Spider Road to the river and a mile north of Zero Road (an off road vehicle area).



6.2 Off-road Vehicle Area

The site is mostly grass with some shrubs. Zero Road crosses the southeast edge and a residential access road borders the northwest edge. There are eight ranchettes bordering the west and south of the area as well as Poison Spider School a quarter mile to the southwest. The 4 wheel-drive recreation area is an old bentonite mine, which serves as an adequate firebreak. There is a muddy water source in a borrow pit close to the parking area. Thirty acres of ponderosa pine are in the center of Section 9, slowing encroaching into the shortgrass-sage. Cattle and horses graze the west half of Section 9. There is no domestic grazing along Zero Road, but significant antelope and deer use. Recreational vehicle use and foraging wildlife keep the fuel load down. The Emigrant Gap Interpretive Site is located next to point 466, off Poison Spider Road. Fire spread is limited due to the roads, recreational use, grazing, large amount of bare ground, and light fuels. However, due to the close proximity to residences bordering the BLM blocks, a moderate and high rating was calculated.

6.2.1 Management Recommendations

1. *Public Outreach and Education.* Although fire spread is limited in the off-road area, high winds could drive fires into residential areas, particularly in the draws and areas of greater horizontal continuity. Homeowners need to be educated on prevention, defensible space, and the benefits of prescribed fire. The local elementary school could be involved to promote these various emphases.
2. *Prescribed Fire.* Prescribe fire could be used to reduce pine encroachment and maintain an earlier successional state.

6.3 Emigrant Ridge

The ridge divides into two anticlines forming a bowl as it goes south toward the river. Wyoming big sage (*Artemisia tridentata ssp. wyomingensis*) and several native grasses are well established. Grass height is generally greater than seven inches and covers 26 to 50% of the ground surface. Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) has become established in



large patches, along with isolated pockets of salt cedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*). Rocky Mountain Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) is also found on isolated rocky ridges.

Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) is found on the decomposed shale ridges with little understory. The terrain is rough and rocky, accessible only by foot, ATV, or horseback. Two collapsed water wells are near point 498 and 508.

Residences are being erected to the west along Twelve Mile Road. A shooting club has a range on the northwest corner of the ridge.

6.3.1 Management Recommendations

1. *Prescribed Fire*. Prescribed fire could be used judiciously on the landscape utilizing existing roads, ridges, and rocky outcrops to decrease shrubs and promote native grasses. Caution needs to be taken in areas where cheatgrass exists.
2. *Cheatgrass Management*. Management of cheatgrass areas with early rotational grazing and possibly herbicides is recommended. Large, wind driven fires could expand the range of the invasive weed.
3. *Land Consolidation*. The isolated 40-acre blocks (519 and 520) could be traded for tracks closer to Emigrant Ridge to consolidate the manageable area. The west quarter of Section 30 is a potential candidate for such a trade.

6.4 Emigrant Gap Ridge Hazard Assessment Rating

<u>Total Rating Score</u>	<u>Hazard Level</u>	<u>Amount (%)</u>
1-14	Low	6
15-21	Moderate	84
21-28	High	10
29-35	Extreme	0